

# Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Grants Program

## Arizona

### Partnership Receives an \$11,400 Conservation Grant.

On May 3, 2004, as authorized under the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act), Steve Williams, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, acting on behalf of Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton, approved \$11,400 in funding for the Effects of Fire on Buff-breasted Flycatchers and Other Neotropical Migrants Project in Arizona's Pima and Cochise Counties in Congressional Districts 7 and 8. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean to conserve neotropical migratory birds and their habitats. Certain activities defined by the Act are eligible for funding, and partnerships must match grant requests 3:1. Contributions from U.S. federal partners do not qualify as match.

The buff-breasted flycatcher is a rare neotropical migrant whose distribution and population has declined dramatically over the past 100 years or more. The total square-kilometer area of its historic range, which encompassed parts of the U.S. Southwest and northern Mexico, has diminished by 88 percent. Nearly all of the bird's known population is now restricted to two small mountain ranges, the Huachuca and Chiricahua Mountains, in southeastern Arizona. In 2000, rangewide surveys of this species found only 74 individuals. The buff-breasted flycatcher is considered a species of conservation priority for Bird Conservation Region 34 (Sierra Madre Occidental) and a wildlife species of special concern (endangered category) in Arizona.

Buff-breasted flycatchers seem to prefer pine forests, particularly where high-intensity ground fires remove dense understory vegetation. The steady population decline of this limited-distribution bird may be related to the more than 100-year-long history of fire suppression in this area, which has allowed hardwood species to colonize the understory.

The catastrophic wildfires that burned throughout Arizona in 2002 and 2003—many in the same area as the routes used for the 2000 population survey—have given project partners a unique opportunity to collect post-burn population and distribution data, and compare them to preburn data. In this project, partners will use the comparative data they collect to evaluate the effects of high- and low-intensity fires on the distribution and abundance of buff-breasted flycatchers and more than 30 other neotropical migratory birds that breed in these montane forests. Results will help managers better understand the role of fire, both natural and prescribed, in providing optimal habitat for forest-breeding migratory birds.



National Park Service

*Chiricahua Mountains in Arizona*

Project partners U.S. Department of the Interior-Joint Fire Sciences Program and Arizona Game and Fish Department are contributing \$34,211 to this project. The study area is within the Sierra Madre Occidental Pine-Oak Forests Ecoregion.

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**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**  
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May 2004

